

ORIGINAL

34 / "Booze"

ADDRESS

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OF THE

U. S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



PRESENTED TO THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON

ALCOHOL ABUSE AND ALCOHOLISM

WASHINGTON, D.C.

NOVEMBER 13, 1987

(GREETINGS TO HOSTS, GUESTS, FRIENDS, ETC.)

I'M DELIGHTED TO JOIN YOU THIS NOON AND PLAY EVEN A MODEST ROLE AT THIS IMPORTANT NATIONAL CONFERENCE.

YOU'VE ALREADY HEARD THE REASONS FOR HAVING SUCH A CONFERENCE AND FOR MOVING AHEAD WITH A PROGRAM TO FIGHT ALCOHOLISM. THOSE REASONS HAVE ALL BEEN PRESENTED BY NOW WITH CONVICTION AND GREAT ELOQUENCE.

I WANTED TO ALERT WOMEN OF CHILD-BEARING AGE THAT THE DATA ON F.A.S. WAS CONCLUSIVE, AS FAR AS THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE WAS CONCERNED:

IF YOU DRINK ALCOHOL WHILE YOU'RE PREGNANT, YOUR BABY MAY BE SERIOUSLY AND IRREVERSIBLY DAMAGED.

BUT I HAVE TO TELL YOU THAT THE SURGEON GENERAL -- FOR ALL HIS OR HER PUTATIVE POWER -- HAS A RATHER LIMITED SPHERE OF INFLUENCE...A SPHERE WHICH IS CAREFULLY DEFINED BY OTHERS.

FOR INSTANCE, OVER 20 YEARS AGO THE U.S. CONGRESS TOLD THE SURGEON GENERAL TO EXERCISE LEADERSHIP IN THE FIELD OF SMOKING.

AND I'VE BEEN DOING THAT, JUST AS MY IMMEDIATE FOUR PREDECESSORS HAD DONE WHILE EACH OF THEM HELD THIS POST.

THEN, A LITTLE OVER A YEAR AGO, PRESIDENT REAGAN DIRECTED ME TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT AIDS. AND I NEEDN'T TELL YOU HOW THAT REQUEST CHANGED MY WORKING DAY.

BUT NO ONE HAS ASSIGNED ME THE TASK OF SPEAKING OUT ON ALCOHOL ABUSE AND ALCOHOLISM. AS A RESULT, IT'S DIFFICULT FOR ME TO DO AND, TO BE PERFECTLY HONEST ABOUT IT, WHEN I DO EXPRESS MY OPINIONS ON THE MATTER, NOT MANY PEOPLE SHOW MUCH INTEREST.

I'M MAKING THIS LITTLE CONFESSION FOR A VERY IMPORTANT REASON. IT ILLUSTRATES THE GREAT SIGNIFICANCE WE SHOULD ATTACH TO THE FACT THAT THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES -- MY BOSS, DR. BOWEN -- HAS TAKEN THE BOLD STEP OF PUTTING HIS DEPARTMENT AND EVERYBODY IN IT ON THE LINE AS FAR AS ALCOHOL IS CONCERNED.

EVEN SURGEONS GENERAL NEED HELP...AND I GOT IT THIS WEEK -- WE ALL DID -- WHEN DR. BOWEN DELIVERED HIS STRONG STATEMENT YESTERDAY MORNING AND, IN EFFECT, GAVE US SOME NEW MARCHING ORDERS.

AND I MIGHT ADD THAT THIS IS JUST WHAT WE'VE ALL COME TO EXPECT FROM THE SECRETARY. WHEN THE COUNTRY HAS A PROBLEM AND NEEDS A CALM BUT FIRM VOICE TO PROVIDE GUIDANCE AND LEADERSHIP, SECRETARY BOWEN HAS STEPPED FORWARD AND GIVEN US THAT.

HE'S DONE THIS IN REFERENCE TO THE MEDICAL MALPRACTICE
ISSUE...HE'S BEEN THE "POINT MAN" ON CATASTROPHIC INSURANCE FOR THE
ELDERLY... HE'S BEEN DEEPLY INVOLVED IN SHAPING OUR A NATIONAL
POLICY FOR FAMILIES...AND SO ON.

AND HE'S PROVIDED THE SAME KIND OF LEADERSHIP ON THIS ISSUE OF
ALCOHOL ABUSE AND ALCOHOLISM.

SO THAT'S MY FIRST POINT...THAT YOU JUST CAN'T TALK ABOUT THIS OR THAT PROBLEM IN AMERICAN LIFE AND HOPE THAT -- MERELY BY TALKING IT UP -- YOU'LL MAKE A DIFFERENCE. THAT'S NOT THE WAY IT WORKS.

NOT UNLESS YOU'RE SOMEONE WITH THE STATURE AND THE AUTHORITY OF THE SECRETARY. NOW, SECRETARY BOWEN HAS DONE IT...AND, THEREFORE, THE REST OF US ARE ON OUR WAY.

MY SECOND POINT IS A LITTLE DIFFERENT.

AS YOU ALL KNOW, I'M SURE, THE U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE AND SEVERAL HUNDRED EXPERTS FROM ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY PUT TOGETHER A SET OF "OBJECTIVES FOR THE NATION" IN THE AREA OF HEALTH PROMOTION AND DISEASE PREVENTION. THEY DID THIS BACK IN 1979 AND 1980.

THAT WAS AN ENORMOUS UNDERTAKING AND A TRULY HISTORIC ONE. FINALLY, WE HAD BEFORE US A SET OF MEASURABLE, QUANTITATIVE GOALS FOR ACHIEVING -- BY THE YEAR 1990 -- A GREATLY IMPROVED LEVEL OF HEALTH STATUS FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES.

THE EXPERTS SET MANY OBJECTIVES, SUCH AS...

LOWER INFANT MORTALITY RATES...

LOWER DEATH RATES ON THE HIGHWAY...

LOWER MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY RATES FROM HEART
DISEASE, CANCER, AND STROKE...

LOWER RATES OF CIGARETTE SMOKING...LESS SODIUM
INTAKE...LOWER SERUM CHOLESTEROL LEVELS...

AND SO ON.

WE'VE BEEN TRACKING THESE THINGS SINCE 1979 AND NOW WE'RE
LOOKING AHEAD TO SETTING NEW OBJECTIVES FOR THE YEAR 2000.

HOWEVER, IF THERE'S ANY ONE ELEMENT THAT CUTS ACROSS ALL THESE
OBJECTIVES -- THE ONES FOR 1990 AND THE ONES BEING PLANNED FOR THE
YEAR 2000 -- THAT SINGLE ELEMENT IS "HUMAN BEHAVIOR."

FOR EXAMPLE, WE WANT TO LOWER THE RATE OF TEENAGE PREGNANCIES
FOR MANY REASONS, NOT THE LEAST OF WHICH IS THE FACT THAT THESE
PREGNANCIES CARRY VERY HIGH HEALTH RISKS FOR BOTH THE MOTHER AND HER
BABY.

BUT WE DON'T HAVE ANY MAGIC VACCINE TO PREVENT TEENAGE WOMEN FROM BECOMING PREGNANT. IN FACT, AS ANY FAMILY PLANNING EXPERT WILL TELL YOU, NO DRUG AND NO DEVICE WORKS QUITE AS WELL AS A YOUNG WOMAN'S OWN DETERMINATION NOT TO GET PREGNANT.

HER OWN BEHAVIOR -- AND THE BEHAVIOR OF THE YOUNG MAN SHE'S WITH -- ARE THE KEYS TO HER BECOMING PREGNANT OR NOT.

AND THE LITERATURE ON TEENAGE PREGNANCY CLEARLY IMPLICATES ALCOHOL AS A KEY FACTOR IN THE BREAKDOWN OF A YOUNG PERSON'S OWN PROTECTIVE AND PREVENTIVE BEHAVIOR.

WE CAN OPEN CLINICS AND RUN IN-SCHOOL SEX EDUCATION COURSES AND ENLIST THE HELP OF CHURCHES AND SO ON. BUT IF WE DON'T RECOGNIZE THE INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL, THEN WE'RE WASTING A LOT OF TIME AND MONEY.

WHEN TEENAGERS DRINK, THEY DO THINGS THEY WOULDN'T DO WHEN THEY'RE SOBER. AND ONE OF THOSE THINGS IS TO IRRESPONSIBLY CONCEIVE A CHILD.

ANOTHER AREA WE'RE CONCERNED ABOUT IS OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY. THIS IS AN AREA IN WHICH WE HOPE TO ACHIEVE SIGNIFICANT GAINS BY 1991 AND EVEN GREATER GAINS BY THE YEAR 2000.

A WHOLE INDUSTRY HAS BEEN DEVELOPED WHICH NOW PRODUCES PROTECTIVE CLOTHING AND FACE MASKS AND EAR PROTECTORS AND GOGGLES AND A THOUSAND OTHER ITEMS FOR WORKER HEALTH AND SAFETY.

BUT NONE OF THESE ITEMS WILL PROTECT THE WORKER, IF HIS OR HER JUDGMENT IS ALTERED BY ALCOHOL. SUCH WORKERS MIGHT AS WELL LEAVE THEIR PROTECTIVE ITEMS IN THEIR LOCKERS, IF ALL THEY DO IS TAKE THEM OUT ON THE JOB-SITE AND USE THEM INCORRECTLY UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL.

AGAIN, THE FUNDAMENTAL, SAFETY-ORIENTED BEHAVIOR THAT PROVIDES BASIC PROTECTION FOR THE AMERICAN WORKER IS RENDERED USELESS, IF THAT WORKER DRINKS.

CONTRARY TO ALL THE T.V. ADS, DRINKING A LOT OF BEER OUT ON THE JOB IS NOT A MANLY THING TO DO. IT'S STUPID, DANGEROUS BEHAVIOR.

SO I MAINTAIN THAT YOU WON'T GET VERY FAR IMPROVING ON-THE-JOB SAFETY, IF YOU DANCE AROUND THE ISSUE OF ALCOHOL.

I COULD GO ON THIS WAY THROUGH ALL THE OBJECTIVES THAT WE'VE SET OUT AND I COULD SHOW YOU HOW AND WHY THE PRESENCE OF ALCOHOL SUBVERTS EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THEM.

BUT I THINK YOU GET THE MESSAGE BY NOW.

THIS NATIONAL CONFERENCE, THEREFORE, IS, IN MY VIEW, A GREAT DEAL MORE THAN JUST ANOTHER MEETING ON ALCOHOL ABUSE AND ALCOHOLISM.

IT REPRESENTS TO ME A RESOUNDING OPENING SALVO BY PEOPLE WHO RECOGNIZE THAT AMERICA WILL ONE DAY HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN ALCOHOL AND HEALTH.

BECAUSE WE CAN'T HAVE BOTH.

WE CANNOT CONTINUE TO HAVE HIGH LEVELS OF TRAFFIC IN ANY DRUGS -- INCLUDING TOBACCO AND ALCOHOL -- AND STILL HOPE TO RAISE THE HEALTH STATUS OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE UP THERE ONTO THE HIGHER PLATEAU WHERE IT OUGHT TO BE.

THAT'S WHY I THINK THE 16 OR SO PUBLIC HEALTH INITIATIVES DISCUSSED AT THIS CONFERENCE ARE SO IMPORTANT.

THOSE INITIATIVES PROVIDE THE DIRECTION AND THE RATIONALE THAT WE ALL NEED, SO THAT WE CAN BEGIN TO DEAL IN A SERIOUS WAY WITH THE ISSUE OF ALCOHOL ABUSE AND ALCOHOLISM IN OUR SOCIETY.

AND -- AS SECRETARY BOWEN CLEARLY INDICATED YESTERDAY AND I COMPLETELY AGREE WITH HIM -- WE MUST DEAL WITH ALCOHOL, IF WE WANT TO ACHIEVE ANY SUBSTANTIVE PROGRESS IN AMERICAN HEALTH STATUS ACROSS THE BOARD.

ONCE AGAIN, I WANT TO THANK THE SECRETARY FOR TAKING LEADERSHIP IN THIS AREA AND FOR POINTING OUT TO THE REST OF US THE DIRECTION WE OUGHT TO BE GOING.

AND I WANT TO THANK EACH OF YOU, WHO HAVE COME TO THIS NATIONAL
CONFERENCE, FOR BEING HERE...

FOR SHARING YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE IN THE DISCUSSIONS
THAT WERE HELD HERE YESTERDAY AND TODAY...

AND FOR CONTRIBUTING YOUR SPECIAL INSIGHTS THAT WILL HELP SHAPE
OUR NATIONAL AGENDA ON ALCOHOL ABUSE AND ALCOHOLISM.

THANK YOU.

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